

WALT WHITMAN, KOSMOS: A STUDY OF THE  
PERSONA OF "SONG OF MYSELF"

An abstract of a dissertation by  
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Although the persona of "Song of Myself" has been the subject of a great deal of critical scholarship, there is general disagreement among the critics regarding the "I" of Whitman's poem. Four major strands of critical thought regarding the persona are evident in the literary criticism, and I have categorized these critical perspectives as follows: (1) the persona as hero, (2) the persona as dualistic self, (3) the persona as protean self, and (4) the persona as kosmos.

Each critical strand of thought is examined in light of the text of "Song of Myself" in order to determine its logic, appropriateness, and defensibility. The argument is advanced that the idea of the persona of "Song of Myself" as a kosmos is the most appropriate critical conceptualization because of its comprehensiveness and cohesiveness. The use of the persona of "Song of Myself" as a metaphor for the cosmos provides unity in the poem and is its central metaphor.

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OF "SONG OF MYSELF"

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by  
Ward P. Welty  
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## CHAPTER I

### THE PERSONA AS HERO

A study of the persona of "Song of Myself" is fraught with the difficulty of interpreting the many interpretations already extant of the "I" of the poem. In researching the criticism regarding the persona of the poem, it became necessary to construct categories and to label the major critical views of the persona. As a result, this study deals with four broad perspectives of the persona and treats the literary scholarship on each of the four perspectives in some detail.

The four conceptual categories are as follows:

(1) the persona as hero, (2) the persona as dualistic self, (3) the persona as polymorphous self, and (4) the persona as "kosmos." Each critical strand of thought is examined insofar as possible as a discrete, mutually exclusive category, but it should be understood that the categories are arbitrarily chosen for the convenience of giving an organizational structure to the study of a literary phenomenon that is so complex it seems to circumscribe if not defy conventional literary analysis.

Several critics hold to a view of the persona of

"Song of Myself" as a hero of one kind or another. Their views can be broken down into four distinct perspectives: (1) the persona as epic or Bardic hero, (2) the persona as romantic or Adamic hero, (3) the persona as Superman, and (4) the persona as comic hero. In Chapter I each of these four views of the persona as hero is analyzed, discussed, and evaluated in light of the text of "Song of Myself."

When the critics of "Song of Myself" refer to the persona as a hero, most of them are harkening back to the classical idea of the poet as prophet, as sayer and namer, as that rare individual who has the ability to glimpse the eternal nature of things and to express his views lyrically. A few critics take the conventional folk hero as their referent, however.

A. Helen Smith points out that, according to Carlyle's Heroes and Hero-Worship, the poet was the third historically evolved hero, after the incarnated god and the seer or prophet.<sup>1</sup> While it cannot be demonstrated that Whitman was familiar with Carlyle's book, Smith contends that the persona of "Song of Myself" is an attempt to reconcile the Carlylean poet with the Emersonian poet. The Carlylean poet was endowed with

<sup>1</sup> A. Helen Smith, "Origin and Interpretation of the Hero of 'Song of Myself,'" The Walt Whitman Review, 17, No. 2 (June 1971), 48.

divine qualities; the Emersonian poet was representative man. In Smith's view, the persona of "Song of Myself" is a Bardic hero who disassociates himself from the masses on the one hand and a democratic poet on the other who identifies readily with the common man.<sup>2</sup>

Smith writes,

Whitman considered the Poet to be the true hero, that he, himself, was that Poet, and that, as such, he should celebrate himself. This egocentrism is part of his initial hero image; it cannot be ignored, but it is often misunderstood.<sup>3</sup>

Smith is correct about the egocentrism of the persona. "I know perfectly well my own egotism," the persona says (l. 1079).<sup>4</sup> "Nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is," he affirms (l. 1264). This egocentrism is precisely what makes the persona an uncommon hero, in Smith's opinion.

Other critics agree that the persona of "Song of Myself" is an epic hero. Miller reads the poem as "a

<sup>2</sup> Smith, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> All quotations from "Song of Myself" are taken from the 1855 edition printed in Gay Wilson Allen, Walter B. Rideout, and James K. Robinson, eds., American Poetry (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 371-434.



sketching forth and a fleshing out of the epic hero, from his creation . . . through his engagement in a crucial test of maturity in America's Civil War . . . concluding with his special insight into the meaning or fulfillment of death."<sup>5</sup> Miller contends that the purpose of "Song of Myself" is to articulate an answer to the question, "What does it mean to be an American?" Therefore, according to Miller, the poem is epic in its ambition and intention, and so is its persona. But Miller defines the epic hero of "Song of Myself" as modern man, the poet representing the common man in 19th century America.

Gay Wilson Allen also regards the persona of "Song of Myself" as an epic hero, comparing him to Odysseus or Beowulf, heroes who find themselves in a sinister, chaotic, and dangerous world but who create order and find a purpose in it.<sup>6</sup> Allen also sees similarities between Whitman's persona and 19th century American folk heroes, pointing out that Whitman

<sup>5</sup> James E. Miller, Jr., Quests Surd and Absurd: Essays in American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> Gay Wilson Allen and Charles T. Davids, eds., Walt Whitman's Poems (Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1955), p. 4.

expressed in his poems not the character and personality actually his in everyday life so much as the vision of physical and spiritual power he shared with the nation. The folk mind created its mythical heroes of supernatural strength: Paul Bunyan, Davy Crockett, John Henry, Mike Fink--demigods of untamed forests and rivers and a raw civilization. On the same scale Walt Whitman created his mythical poet, whom he personified in himself.<sup>7</sup>

Roy Harvey Pearce echoes Allen, writing that "Song of Myself" is the clearest, surest, most self-contained and complete, and most widely gauged product of Whitman's desire to create an American epic."<sup>8</sup> Pearce refers to "Song of Myself" as a "proto-epic," and he conceives of the persona as a hero who releases all of the creative powers of the self.<sup>9</sup>

In the critical view of the persona of "Song of Myself" as hero, then, the persona is conceived of as a hero in the epic or bardic tradition, a virtuoso poet who creates his own mythology and ranges across America and the universe, trampling a perpetual journey, afoot with his vision.

<sup>7</sup> Allen and Davids, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> Pearce, p. 83.

It should be apparent that the view of the persona as epic hero depends on a reading of "Song of Myself" as an epic and upon a definition of hero that has its roots in classical and folk legends. The problem with this interpretation of the persona, as I see it, is that "Song of Myself" is not an epic, and its persona is certainly not heroic in any traditional sense of the word.

"Song of Myself" does not celebrate a great heroic tradition, nor does it feature the exploits of a great hero. It is not a narrative poem like the epic; many critics have pointed out that it lacks a logical structure. The poem is an interior monologue rather than an epic. It is a personal meditation or recitation that flows from the mind of the poet. It is not a retelling or recounting of events, it is a serving up of the subjective thoughts of the poet.

The persona of the poem, unlike the epic hero, is not a man of action, a doer of great deeds; he is passive rather than active. In the second stanza of the poem, the poet writes, "I loafe and invite my soul, I lean and loafe at my ease....observing a spear of summer grass" (ll. 4-5). Here is an early clue to the nature of the persona. He is not a warrior, he is a thinker, who reflects upon the nature of the universe and himself as he lies relaxing on the grass.

Of course the persona is bardic. He is an American bard. But is he a hero? I read the persona as being more like a solitary singer, whose "words are of a questioning, and to indicate reality," (l. 1082) and whose purpose is to "sound [his] barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" (l. 1323). In Sections 21 and 22 he refers to himself as poet:

I am the poet of the body,  
And I am the poet of the soul. (ll. 422-23)

I am the poet of the woman the same  
as the man. (l. 426)

I am the poet of commonsense and of  
the demonstrable and of immortality;  
And am not the poet of goodness only....  
I do not decline to be the poet  
of wickedness also. (ll. 466-67)

The persona is bardic, not epic; he is a protagonist rather than a hero. He is

the protagonist [who] wills himself to be at the mercy of his world; for he knows that in his world lies his only source of the creative forms, the range of experiences, which will let him complete the cycle of the self-recognition, identification with others, and self-definition which has been initiated by his original insight into his destiny.<sup>10</sup>

The persona's description of himself as "one of the roughs" provides the basis for the second critical

<sup>10</sup> Pearce, p. 73.

view of the persona as hero. A "rough" in graphic design parlance is an unfinished sketch. It is a picture or drawing in its earliest stage. For the persona to refer to himself as a "rough" implies that he is an unfinished person, a person in the process of becoming completed or finished, one who is still in a developmental stage.

Furthermore, "rough" has connotations of "primitive," as opposed to "sophisticated," "natural" as opposed to "affected." So the persona's self-description as "one of the roughs" reveals a poetic conception of himself as an innocent who is in the process of becoming. "I become as much more as I like, I become any presence or truth of humanity," the persona remarks (ll. 940-41).

R. W. B. Lewis and others perceive the persona as an Adamic or romantic hero. According to Lewis, "the hero . . . radiates the kind of primal innocence in an innocent world . . . not only because he had made that world . . . [but] also because he had begun by making himself."<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note that underlying the view

<sup>11</sup> R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 49.

of the persona as Adamic hero is the belief in the humanness of the persona. This view presupposes that the persona is, like Adam, a man trying to make sense out of and to cope with his environment. James E. Miller notes that, from the beginning, the image that dominates "Song of Myself" is human. "The speaker is not only human but familiarly and closely human," Miller writes, and "the dominant image that gradually emerges is that of a sharply clear and vivid, but composite and multiple personality."<sup>12</sup> Henseler also views the persona as an Adamic hero, arguing that the "I" of the poem should be understood as the creative act.<sup>13</sup>

Lewis refers to the persona as "the new Adam," and he claims that "Song of Myself" is "the story of the hero in space."<sup>14</sup>

What is implicit in every line of Whitman is the belief that the Poet projects a world of order and meaning and identity into either a chaos or a sheer vacuum; he does not discover it. The poet may salute the chaos; but he creates the world.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> James E. Miller, Jr., A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 199.

<sup>13</sup> Donna L. Henseler, "The Voice of the Grass-Poem 'I': Whitman's 'Song of Myself,'" The Walt Whitman Review, 15, No. 1 (March 1969), 30.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, p. 51.

This view of the persona is not only Adamic, it is also Romantic. The poet-persona is conceived as projecting rather than reflecting the world, and of creating meaning rather than being bound by tradition and authority.

In my opinion, the similarities between the Adam of the Old Testament and the persona of "Song of Myself" are not sufficient to warrant labeling the persona "Adamic." The persona of "Song of Myself" certainly has a sense of his individuality, but he is definitely not an innocent. He does not have a sense of original sin. He calls himself "disorderly fleshly and sensual," (l. 500) and he revels in the sensual:

Through me forbidden voices,  
Voices of sexes and lusts....voices  
veiled, and  
I remove the veil.  
Voices indecent by me clarified and  
transfigured. (ll. 518-20)

I believe in the flesh and the appetites.  
(l. 534)

If I worship any particular thing it shall  
be some of the spread of my body:  
Translucent mould of me it shall be you.  
(ll. 529-30)

Unlike Adam, the persona does not feel guilty or ashamed of his body or his nakedness. In fact the persona is unashamedly narcissistic: "I dote on myself . . . there is that lot of me, and all so luscious," (l. 545) he proclaims. The abundance of sexual imagery

in "Song of Myself" gainsays an Adamic interpretation of the persona, in my opinion. The metaphor is specious, the analogy forced, because the persona of "Song of Myself" resembles Adam only in his supreme awareness of his individuality.

The persona does not believe in the Christian concept of God. He seems to flout traditional religion:

Divine am I inside and out, and I make  
 holy whatever I touch or am touched  
 from;  
 The scent of these arm-pits is aroma  
 finer than prayer,  
 This head is more than churches or bibles  
 or creeds. (ll. 526-28)

And nothing, not God, is greater to one  
 than one's self is. (l. 1264)

The supernatural of no account . . . my-  
 self waiting my time to be one of the  
 supremes, (l. 1045)

By my life-lumps! becoming already a  
 creator!  
 Putting myself here and now to the am-  
 bushed womb of the shadows! (ll. 1048-49)

The textual evidence overwhelms Lewis' contention that the persona radiates a primal innocence in an innocent world. The persona is not an innocent, and the world he inhabits and writes about is not innocent, either.

Another view of the persona of "Song of Myself" is that the persona is a superman. This view is of course in conflict with earlier views expressed



that the dominant image of the persona is human.

Strauch argues that the persona becomes a superman in Sections 39-41,<sup>16</sup> and Tanner holds that the entire poem is about the Superman.<sup>17</sup> Black writes that "behind much of 'Song of Myself' is a wish to justify . . . a fantasy of omnipotence. Whitman imagines becoming God, the 'loving bedfellow' who raises the dead and covers continents with the palms of his hands."<sup>18</sup> Miller acknowledges that at times the image of the persona assumes superhuman dimensions, but thinks the persona is essentially human rather than superhuman.<sup>19</sup>

Tanner postulates that the persona is a Superman because he has the following attributes: athletic ability, arrogance, affection, invincibility, and erudition,<sup>20</sup> and he defines the Superman as "one who has infused himself into, and been absorbed by, all of

<sup>16</sup> Carl F. Strauch, "The Structure of Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself,'" English Journal, 27 (September 1938), 599.

<sup>17</sup> James T. F. Tanner, "The Superman in Leaves of Grass," The Walt Whitman Review, 11, No. 4 (December 1965), 86.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen A. Black, Whitman's Journey into Chaos: A Psychoanalytic Study of the Poetic Process (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 83.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass, p. 199.

<sup>20</sup> Tanner, p. 89.

life's processes,"<sup>21</sup> a definition not of the persona as superman, but of the persona as kosmos. (The idea of the persona as kosmos is dealt with at length in a later chapter.)

The persona can be construed as a kind of superman in Section 33:

My ties and ballasts leave me....I  
travel....I sail....my elbows rest  
in the sea-gaps,  
I skirt the sierras . . . my palms  
cover continents,  
I am afoot with my vision. (ll. 712-14)

I fly the flight of the fluid and  
swallowing soul,  
My course runs below the soundings of  
plummets.  
I help myself to material and immaterial,  
No guard can shut me off, no law can  
prevent me. (ll. 799-802)

If there is a Superman section in "Song of Myself," it is in Section 33; not in Sections 39-41, as Strauch contends. There is little if any textual evidence to support Strauch's contention, and Tanner points out that Strauch does not discuss the matter of the Superman in Sections 39-41 at length.<sup>22</sup>

I prefer Miller's view of the persona. "At times the image assumes superhuman proportions," he writes,

<sup>21</sup> Tanner, p. 89.

<sup>22</sup> Tanner, p. 87.

[but] "the image established at the outset of 'Song of Myself' and dominating the poem is human."<sup>23</sup> The view of the persona as superman, then, is not substantiable by textual evidence, although it must be granted that the persona of "Song of Myself" does imaginatively assume superman-like powers, particularly in Section 33.

A final critical view of the persona is as comic hero. I find this view amusing. The first critic to express the idea was Constance Rourke in American Humor, and a modern advocate of this point of view is Richard Chase.<sup>24</sup> Chase believes that much of the tone of "Song of Myself" is comic, explaining that the comedy results from the sense of incongruity the persona's self perceives vis a vis the other selves in the poem.<sup>25</sup> E. H. Miller refers to the persona as a "comic impregnator, a fertility god," citing the following lines from Section 40: "On women fit for conception I start bigger and nimbler babes. This day I am jetting the stuff of far more arrogant republics."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Miller, A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass, p. 198.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Chase, Walt Whitman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Chase, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Edwin Haviland Miller, Walt Whitman's Poetry: A Psychological Journey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), pp. 106-107.

Chase finds the persona's donning and doffing of different guises or identities throughout the course of the poem amusing.

The recurring motif of "Song of Myself" is the identification of the self with other selves, often highly incongruous ones, followed by the extrication of the self from its momentarily assumed identity. This repeated dialectic act, or assumption and rejection of masks, accounts for much of the inner brilliance and wit --which as anyone can see is not simply boisterous humor--of "Song of Myself."<sup>27</sup>

Chase writes that the persona, having no clear sense of identity, delights in trying on tentative guises. The persona, he claims, "illustrates the fluid, unformed personality exulting alternately in its provisional attempts to define itself and in its sense that it has no definition."<sup>28</sup>

I find the view of the persona as comic hero completely subjective and, therefore, extremely difficult to affirm or deny by textual investigation. I find a few lines rather funny, but I do not think either the poem or the persona is consistently comic. There are

<sup>27</sup> Chase, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Chase, Walt Whitman Reconsidered (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1955), p. 60.

plenty of serious passages. For example, in Section 43, the passage beginning with the statement, "My faith is the greatest of faiths," (l. 1093) I take to be a serious attempt on the part of the persona to convey his religious beliefs. The section has been set to music and is mystical rather than comic in tone.

Gay Wilson Allen repudiates the view of the persona of "Song of Myself" as comic in the following quotation:

Chase's interpretation of "Song of Myself" as a comic poem supplies a context which the poet obviously did not intend--though in some passages he was deliberately ironical, satirical, self-mocking--so that, if he was a comic poet, it was inadvertent or only in a fleeting mood.<sup>29</sup>

The idea of the persona as a comic hero is another view of the persona that will not stand up to thoughtful analysis and textual exegesis, and it is decidedly a view of the persona of "Song of Myself" that is held by a critical minority.

In this chapter the persona of "Song of Myself" has been examined, analyzed, and evaluated in light of four critical conceptualizations: (1) the persona as

<sup>29</sup> Gay Wilson Allen, A Reader's Guide to Walt Whitman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), p. 149.

epic hero, (2) the persona as Adamic hero, (3) the persona as Superman, and (4) the persona as comic hero. Each of the four critical views was found to have its individual merits but was held to be deficient as a creditable and consistent overall description and explanation of the "I" of the poem. That is to say, none of the critical perspectives uniformly describes the persona of "Song of Myself"--the persona does not fit neatly into any one of them. Although it is difficult to nail down the persona, it should not be impossible. Heeding the poet himself, who wrote: "Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, / Missing me one place search another, / I stop somewhere waiting for you," (ll. 1334-36), we continue the search in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PERSONA AS DUALISTIC SELF

Many critics read the persona of "Song of Myself" as dualistic. Chari refers to the persona as a "duplex personality," arguing that the persona is both objective and symbolic.<sup>1</sup> Stovall writes that

Whitman has . . . accentuated . . . a condition that exists in every individual. The sense of duality is merely a recognition of man's finite and infinite selves and of his consciousness of being both subject and object, the knower and the thing known. In short, it is simply the phenomenon of self-consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

Marki characterizes the persona as both generic and personal. The personal self is the "strictly individual identity," he writes; the generic self is the "visionary realization of the . . . self in the midst

<sup>1</sup> V. K. Chari, Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism: An Interpretation (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Floyd Stovall, "Walt Whitman and the American Tradition," Virginia Quarterly Review, 3 (Autumn 1955), in John C. Broderick, ed., Whitman the Poet (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 161.

of all human experience."<sup>3</sup> Rourke notes that

for the first time in American literature, perhaps for the first time in all literature, [Whitman] created a generic and inclusive "I" who embraces many minds and many experiences. Passage after passage in his poems begins with the personal experience or mood only to drop these for the generic.<sup>4</sup>

E. H. Miller understands the persona as a "false" self at the start of the poem who becomes "orgiastic" as the poem progresses.<sup>5</sup> Carlisle refers to the self of the persona as monological and dialogical. "The poem moves essentially from concentration on the monological self to a discovery of the dialogical self," he writes.<sup>6</sup> Rajasekhariah describes the persona as both the "external phenomenal self" and the "true identity, the internal, real soul."<sup>7</sup>

Middlebrook writes that "Whitman is solely

<sup>3</sup> Ivan Marki, The Trial of the Poet: An Interpretation of the First Edition of Leaves of Grass (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> Constance Rourke, "Whitman's Comic Hero," in Broderick, p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, Walt Whitman's Poetry: A Psychological Journey, p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> E. Fred Carlisle, The Uncertain Self: Whitman's Drama of Identity (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1973), p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> T. R. Rajasekhariah, The Roots of Whitman's Grass



concerned with making distinctions between his ordinary self and the persona he described . . . the Real Me."<sup>8</sup>

Fein divides the self of the persona into the following dualities: passive-active, unique-shared, energetic-passive, optimistic-burdened, and observing-merging.<sup>9</sup>

To Chase the problem of understanding the persona of "Song of Myself" stems from "the paradox of identity," and he explains that

Whitman's relation of the self to the rest of the universe is a successful aesthetic or compositional device. . . . if we look at Whitman's implicit metaphor more closely, we see that it consists in the paradox of "identity," in two senses of the word; on the one hand, [the persona] is integral in himself, unique, and separate; on the other hand, he is equal to, or even the same as, everyone else. Whitman senses that his metaphor of self vs. en-masse is a paradox.<sup>10</sup>

Allen writes that Whitman "was always . . . conscious of himself as two, 'my soul and I,'-- two levels

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(Rutherford, N. J.: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 1970), p. 261.

<sup>8</sup> Diane Wood Middlebrook, Walt Whitman and Wallace Stevens (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Richard J. Fein, "Walt Whitman and the Emancipated Self," Centennial Review, 21, No. 1 (Winter 1976), 36.

<sup>10</sup> Chase, Walt Whitman Reconsidered, pp. 64-65.

of consciousness, the modern psychologist would say,"<sup>11</sup> and Coleman makes an interesting point about the "ambiguities of 'I'" in "Song of Myself":

Throughout Leaves of Grass, and especially in the early sections of "Song of Myself," Whitman uses "I" with inconsistent terms of reference. The "I" is at one point the body; at another point it is the soul; and very frequently also, it is a combination of body and soul. Occasionally, too, the "I" is seemingly none of the above possibilities.<sup>12</sup>

The "I" of "Song of Myself" is nearly impossible to pin down, to define simply in clearly understandable terms, as should be apparent from the criticism. The above quotation may help explain why the persona of "Song of Myself" is ambiguous, why it sometimes seems inconsistent, and why it has so egregiously eluded exegesis.

In this chapter the persona will be examined as dualistic self in an attempt to determine if that conceptualization is appropriate and accurate and if it constitutes an overall interpretation of the persona that consistently illuminates the meaning and, there-

<sup>11</sup> Allen, p. 129.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Y. Coleman, "Walt Whitman's Ambiguities of 'I,'" Papers on Language and Literature, 5, supplement (Summer 1969), 50.

fore, the understanding of the poem. The concept of the persona as dualistic self will be examined both in light of the criticism on this point and in light of the text.

The first indication of the duality of the persona is in Section 1:

I celebrate myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good  
belongs to you. (ll. 1-3)

In the third line, the persona may be read as moving from the personal or objective self to the generic or universal self. From the beginning, then, the persona of "Song of Myself" is presented as a duality, expressing two sides of the self. The self is not merely the poet, the self of "Song of Myself" is also a transcendental self, a self capable of transcending the person of the poet and flowing into all of the other selves in the world by an act of imagination.

Cowley explains that there is a difference between "one's mere personality and the deeper Self. . . . [Whitman] believed that the Self (or atman, to use a Sanskrit word) is of the same essence as the universal spirit."<sup>13</sup> The initial duality expressed in Section 1,

<sup>13</sup> Malcolm Cowley, "'Song of Myself' and Indian

then, is the concept of the persona as both individual man and universal man, as personal being and generic being, as objective entity and symbolic entity. This duality may also be read as a body-soul dichotomy. For the body is individual, the soul universal; the body is personal, the soul, generic; and the body is objective, the soul, symbolic.

James E. Miller, Jr. believes that "the vital self is not the fragmented self, the body alone or the soul alone, but the body and soul fused into a single entity--a fusion achieved through the fully experienced senses."<sup>14</sup> The self of the persona of "Song of Myself" is, as has been demonstrated, body (personal, objective, and individual) and soul (generic, symbolic, and universal).

In lines 4 and 5 of Section 1, the persona alludes to his dual self:

I loafe and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease....observing  
a spear of summer grass.

The "I" at this juncture is the physical body, inviting

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Philosophy," in E. H. Miller (ed.), A Century of Whitman Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 241.

<sup>14</sup> James E. Miller, Jr., Quests Surd and Absurd, p. 100.

the soul to rest and relax on the grass. In the following stanzas, the soul animates the persona's imagination, taking his physical body imaginatively through the wood, to the shore, into the barn, and onto the streets.

In Section 3 the persona praises both his soul and his body: "Clear and sweet is my soul....and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul," (l. 44) he sings. He continues, saying, "Lack one lacks both....and the unseen is proved by the seen, / Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn." In other words, the persona cannot conceive of the body without the soul or vice versa ("lack one, lacks both"), and he believes that the body provides the proof of the soul ("the unseen [the soul] is proved by the seen" [the body]).

In Section 4 the persona alludes to the "trippers and askers," the people he meets, the current happenings of the day, his friends and associates, and other social occurrences, and concludes: "They come to me days and nights and go from me again, / But they are not the Me myself" (ll. 64-65). What does the poet mean by the "me Myself"? There have been many glosses on those lines--many attempts to explain the "me Myself."

Carlisle believes that there are two basic

dualities expressed in the preface (Sections 1-5) of "Song of Myself." He writes, [the persona] "has not yet overcome the two fundamental dichotomies in his world--that between his soul and body and the one between the 'Me myself' and the world."<sup>15</sup>

Middlebrook refers to the "Me myself" as the "Real Me" and claims that the "Real Me" is "the personification of an act of imagination,"<sup>16</sup> [Whitman's] "personal power of creativity."<sup>17</sup> However, a reading of the text makes it clear that the "Me myself" or Middlebrook's "Real Me" is the soul as opposed to the body of the persona:

Apart from the pulling and hauling  
stands what I am,  
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,  
Looks down, is erect, bends an arm on an  
impalpable certain rest,  
Looks with its sidecurved head curious  
what will come next,  
Both in and out of the game, and watching  
and wondering at it. (ll. 66-70)

The "what I am," which is also the "Me myself," is the soul, which explains why the arm can be bent on an "impalpable" or intangible "rest." If the referent

<sup>15</sup> Carlisle, p. 181.

<sup>16</sup> Middlebrook, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Middlebrook, p. 58.

here were the physical body, the word "impalpable" would be inappropriate. Also the use of the impersonal possessive noun, "its," instead of the personal possessive pronoun, "my," helps discriminate between the personal, individual, physical, and objective self (the body) and the impersonal, universal, symbolic, and generic self (the soul).

Further evidence that the "Me myself" and the "what I am" are references to the soul can be found in the line, "Both in and out of the game, and watching and wondering at it." Only the soul can be both "in and out of the game," both participant and spectator at the same time. The body must either be in the game or out of it. Whitman employs a kind of literary metempsychosis in "Song of Myself" that enables the persona to assume any identity he pleases. Metempsychosis, or the transmigration of the soul, is the doctrine that the soul departs from the body at death and migrates to another body. In "Song of Myself" Whitman employs a variation on this theme by endowing the persona's soul with the ability to transmigrate temporarily into the body of others, and thus to attain complete empathic identification with those others. Thus the soul of the persona becomes the agency of the imagination in "Song of Myself" as I read it.

In Section 5, the persona continues to discriminate

and differentiate between the soul and the body:

I believe in you my soul....the other  
 I am must not abase itself to you,  
 And you must not be abased to the  
 other. (ll. 73-74)

In this section, the soul is opposed to the "other I am," the body (again note the use of the impersonal "itself"), and the persona states that neither the soul nor the body must abase the other, implying that both are of equal importance and value. In the imaginative scene that follows, the body and soul cavort with each other until a kind of consummation is effected:

I mind how we lay in June, such a  
 transparent summer morning;  
 You settled your head athwart my hips  
 and gently turned over me,  
 And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone,  
 and plunged your tongue to my  
 barestript heart,  
 And reached till you felt my beard, and  
 reached till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the  
 peace and joy and knowledge that pass  
 all the art and argument of the earth;  
 And I know that the hand of God is the  
 elderhand of my own,  
 And I know that the spirit of God is the  
 eldest brother of my own,  
 And that all the men ever born are also  
 my brothers....and the women my sisters  
 and lovers,  
 And that a kelson of the creation is love.  
 (ll. 78-86)

In the above stanzas from Section 5, a transcendent



state is achieved as a consequence of the union of the body and soul. The persona becomes one with the universe and finds perfect peace and understanding.

Chase points out that

the characteristic quality of Whitman's best poetry arises either from the . . . tensions evoked when the self is shown to be in a state of contradiction or polarity with the not-self or from the lyric harmony . . . which is evoked when the self is felt to be identical with the not-self or some aspect of it.<sup>18</sup>

In Section 5 the tensions are momentarily vanquished, a union is momentarily effected, and the persona has a mystical or transcendent experience as a result.

The dualistic nature of the persona is undeniable in the first five sections of "Song of Myself." The self is presented as both body and soul, and the idea is expressed that a union of those dualities is necessary for the persona to achieve inner peace. However, in Section 7, the persona changes character. The section begins as follows:

Has any one supposed it lucky to be  
born?  
I hasten to inform him or her it is just  
as lucky to die, and I know it.

<sup>18</sup> Chase, Walt Whitman, p. 13.

I pass death with the dying, and  
 birth with the new-washed babe....  
 and am not contained between my  
 hat and boots,  
 And peruse manifold objects, no two  
 alike, and every one good,  
 The earth good, and the stars good,  
 and their adjuncts all good.

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of  
 an earth,  
 I am the mate and companion of people,  
 all just as immortal and fathomless  
 as myself;  
 They do not know how immortal, but I  
 know. (ll. 122-29)

The "I" of Section 7 is no ordinary poet possessed of a body and soul. An additional dimension has been added. The persona has shifted from the phenomenal realm to the metaphysical. Chari explains the shift as follows:

Whitman seems to recognize two distinct planes of existence--the one phenomenal, the other metaphysical. He seems, in his evaluation of life, to view things from two different standpoints--from the point of view of the enlightened individual, and that of those who are unenlightened,<sup>19</sup> and who live on the empirical level.

Phenomenology refers to the concrete world, to the world of objects and ordinary thought; metaphysics refers to the attempt to divine first principles, to discover the abstract truths underlying reality.

<sup>19</sup> Chari, p. 155.

Chari is arguing that the persona in "Song of Myself" is exhibiting a phenomenological-metaphysical duality. The persona refers to himself as "immortal and fathomless," as one who "can never be shaken away" (l. 139), one who will "come again and again" (l. 159). He is more than a generic self, for he includes not only all others, like him, living human beings, but also the dead and those not yet born. His thoughts do not belong to him alone, either:

These are the thoughts of all men  
           in all ages and lands, they are  
           not original with me,  
 If they are not yours as much as mine  
           they are nothing or next to nothing,  
 If they do not enclose everything they  
           are next to nothing  
 If they are not the riddle and the  
           untying of the riddle they are  
           nothing,  
 If they are not just as close as they  
           are distant they are nothing.  
 (ll. 353-57)

The persona is generic, universal, and metaphysical. His thoughts are supposed to include the "riddle" (the question) and the "untying of the riddle" (the answer). Some of the metaphysical questions to be answered are, "Who need be afraid of the merge?" (l. 136), "What is a man anyhow? What am I? and What are you?" (l. 389)

Reverting to the personal "I," the persona remarks, "I have pried through the strata and analyzed to a hair, / And counselled with doctors and calculated

close and found no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones" (l. 400). But in the description that follows, the "I" becomes generic again:

And I know I am solid and sound,  
 To me the converging objects of the  
     universe perpetually flow,  
 All are written to me, and I must get  
     what the writing means.  
 And I know I am deathless. (ll. 403-406)

I laugh at what you call dissolution,  
 And I know the amplitude of time.  
     (ll. 420-21)

The persona in these passages is exhibiting the universal, generic, metaphysical, and symbolic side of his dual self. In the passages that immediately follow, however, he again reverts to the personal, objective, individual, phenomenal half of his duality:

I am the poet of the body,  
 And I am the poet of the soul.  
     (ll. 422-23)

I am the poet of the woman the same  
     as the man. (l. 426)

I am he that walks with the tender  
     and growing night;  
 I call to the earth and sea half-held  
     by night. (ll. 434-35)

And again his identity changes:

Capricious and dainty sea!  
 I am integral with you....I too am of one  
     phase and of all phases. (ll. 460-61)

I moisten the roots of all that  
has grown. (l. 472)

Through me the afflatus surging and  
surging....through me the current  
and index. (l. 506)

Divine am I inside and out. . . . (l. 526)

At line 526 the persona refers again to his dual nature: he is not monologically divine, he is dialogically divine; he is divine "inside and out": both his body and his soul are divine.

Another duality noted in the persona is the duality of the ordinary and the cosmic consciousness. (Cosmic consciousness will be treated at length in a later chapter.) Chari equates what he calls "the metaphysical essence" with "cosmic consciousness," stating that

When [Whitman] says, "I believe in you  
my soul, the other I am must not abase  
itself to you / And you must not be  
abased to the other," the "soul" with  
which he communicates is the metaphysical  
essence, the cosmic consciousness,  
and the "other I am" [is] the physical  
self or the ordinary consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

The persona continues to accumulate dualities. The most important and significant dualities so far noted and discussed are as follows: body-soul, generic-personal, individual-universal, metaphysical-phenomenal

<sup>20</sup> Chari, p. 78.

and self-conscious-cosmic-conscious. It remains to be seen whether any one set of dualities is sufficient unto itself to describe the persona of "Song of Myself."

From Section 33 the persona becomes universal or cosmic:

My ties and ballasts leave me....I  
 travel....I sail....my elbows rest  
 in the sea-gaps,  
 I skirt the sierras....my palms cover  
 continents,  
 I am afoot with my vision. (ll. 712-15)

Or the above passage can be read as the Superman, as has been previously noted.

In Section 41 the universal side of the persona's self becomes messianic:

The Supernatural of no account....my-  
 self waiting my time to be one of  
 the supremes,  
 The day getting ready for me when I  
 shall do as much good as the best,  
 and be as prodigious,  
 Guessing when I am it will not tickle  
 me much to receive puffs out of  
 pulpit or print;  
 By my life-lumps! becoming already a  
 creator!  
 Putting myself here and now to the am-  
 bushed womb of the shadows!  
 (ll. 1045-49)

The persona "launch[es] all men and women forward with [him] into the unknown" (l. 1134). He is "an acme of things accomplished, and . . . an encloser of things

to be" (l. 1148). From his cosmic or universal perspective, he explains that

All forces have been steadily employed  
to complete and delight me,  
Now I stand on this spot with my soul.  
(ll. 1167-68)

Every condition promulges not only  
itself....it promulges what grows  
after and out of itself (l. 1180)

There is no stoppage and never can be  
stoppage (l. 1189)

See ever so far....there is limitless  
space outside of that,  
Count ever so much....there is limitless  
time around that. (ll. 1195-96)

I know I have the best of time and  
space--and that I was never measured,  
and never will be measured. (l. 1198)

The past and present wilt....I have  
filled them and emptied them,  
And proceed to fill my next fold of  
the future. (ll. 1309-10)

Gay Wilson Allen perceives the persona as the  
immortal soul. He writes,

Obviously the "I" who fills and empties  
past and present and proceeds to its  
"next fold of the future" is no ordinary  
mortal, not the ego of a finite human  
being, but an immortal soul . . . animating  
all forms of being and undiminished by the  
"perpetual transfers and promotions." <sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Gay Wilson Allen, The Two Poets of Leaves of Grass (Westwood, N. J.: The Kindle Press, 1969), p. 6.

nother duality is evident: a finite-infinite duality.

The self of the persona may be construed as dualistic, and there is textual evidence to support the following polarities: body-soul, individual-universal, objective-symbolic, generic-personal, phenomenal-metaphysical, self-conscious-cosmic-conscious, and finite-infinite. The persona of "Song of Myself" contains all of those dualities and more. And a case may be made that any one of the dual polarities is the most important unifying device in the poem. Regardless of which set of dualities one favors, there can be no doubt as to the dualistic nature of the persona. Both the critical scholarship and the text substantiate that critical conceptualization, and in a later chapter I will argue at length that the crucial duality of the poem stems from the self-conscious-cosmic-conscious dichotomy.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE PERSONA AS PROTEAN SELF

Many critics have noted and discussed the changing nature of the persona of "Song of Myself." Throughout the poem the persona is continually changing his identity. The persona either identifies with others so closely that he seems to transform himself into them, or he describes himself in so many different terms of reference that he appears not to have a consistent and essential identity.

As a result, there is general disagreement as to how to describe the self of the persona of "Song of Myself." The time has come to determine whether there is one persona or a series of personae in the poem. In other words, is it accurate to regard the persona as unitary or would it be more appropriate to take the position that there are many selves in "Song of Myself"?

My position is that the "Myself" of "Song of Myself" must be read as a persona, for how can the singular first person pronoun, "I," possibly be construed to serve as the referent of more than one self? The pronoun, "we," serves as the plural referent, and the

poet, Walt Whitman, surely would have used the first person plural had it suited his purposes.

The assumption underlying this chapter on the protean self, then, is that there is just one persona in "Song of Myself," and that any description of that persona must come to grips with the problem of understanding the polymorphous nature of the persona. So far the persona has been discussed and evaluated as hero-protagonist (in Chapter 1), and his dualistic qualities were noted (in Chapter 2). In this chapter the persona as protean self will be discussed, analyzed, and evaluated in light of the literary criticism on this point and the text itself.

Any discussion regarding the self should be prefaced with an understanding that the scientific concept of "self" is by definition pluralistic rather than monologic. The self is made up of at least five sub-selves, according to the psychologists Walters and Paul.<sup>1</sup> Walters and Paul contend that the self consists of the following components: (1) the real self, (2) the ideal self, (3) the self-image, (4) the apparent self, and (5) the reference group image.

<sup>1</sup> C. Glenn Walters and Gordon W. Paul, Consumer Behavior, An Integrated Framework (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irvin, Inc., 1970), pp. 231-39.

The real self is the person's physical and emotional makeup, the ideal self is that which the person would like to become, the self-image is how the person sees himself and includes the real self and the ideal self, the apparent self is the self as perceived by others, and the reference group image is the self's impression of how others perceive him. It is not surprising, given the pluralistic nature of the self, that the critics have had such a difficult time describing the "Myself" of "Song of Myself."

Kummings writes,

Much of the complexity of the [personal] derives from his astoundingly protean character. With no difficulties whatsoever he becomes "of old and young . . . , maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man . . . ." With phenomenal ease he is suddenly "of every hue and caste . . . , of every rank and religion, / A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker, / Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest . . . ." This metamorphic tendency is tied up with his ability to identify omnivorously with the experience of other human beings and with things.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note that where Kummings defines the self as protean, others have defined it as generic (cf. Chapter 2). But there is no doubt that the

<sup>2</sup> Donald D. Kummings, "The Vernacular Hero in Whitman's 'Song of Myself,'" The Walt Whitman Review, 23, No. 1 (March 1977), 24.

ability of the persona to transform himself, albeit imaginatively, into another person, has non-plussed many critics.

For example, both Fein and Black are confounded by the protean nature of the persona. "Where," asks Fein, "in the multiplicity of selves--all those selves that Whitman sees the world offering us--is the true identity?"<sup>3</sup> Black writes:

One of the greatest obstacles for those who would interpret "Song of Myself" is that we do not know exactly what to make of the narrator's predilection for identifying himself with persons and things in the world around him.<sup>4</sup>

Cook notes that in Sections 19 through 25, Whitman

presents those things which he is to include as being of the same self and identity as the poet. He includes (a) body, (b) soul, (c) good, (d) evil, (e) man, (f) woman, (g) nature.<sup>5</sup>

Reed goes even further, arguing that the self of the persona eventually includes everything:

<sup>3</sup> Fein, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Black, p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond A. Cook, "Empathic Identification in 'Song of Myself': A Key to Whitman's Poetry," The Walt Whitman Review, 23, No. 4 (December 1977), 7.

Everything becomes part of the "I" of the poem, everything is absorbed by the first person persona, good and evil, and beautiful and ugly. All things and all people are joined in the whole that is Walt Whitman, the "I" of "Song of Myself."<sup>6</sup>

Rajasekhariah refers to the persona as a "gigantic complex," a "compound" self, and as an "all-inclusive" self.<sup>7</sup> He perceives the persona as "the autobiographical man, the universal poet, the prophetic teacher, and the revealing God."<sup>8</sup> Rajasekhariah explains the "compound" self as follows:

This self so celebrated is recognizably not just his simple self as an individual, nor even the more than ordinary self of a richly endowed poet; nor is it just the typical self of humanity with which a genius identifies himself for his artistic operations; nor, again, is it only the absolute self of philosophical speculation which one learns of in metaphysical writings. The self he unfolds in his poetry is a compound of all these; his "I" has an identity whose dimensions range from the simple to the absolute: the animal of sex, the man of society, the poet of imagination, the universal man, and God Almighty, are all there, not as

<sup>6</sup> Michael D. Reed, "First Person Persona and the Catalogue in 'Song of Myself,'" The Walt Whitman Review, 23, No. 4 (December 1977), 151.

<sup>7</sup> Rajasekhariah, p. 261.

<sup>8</sup> Rajasekhariah, p. 308.

several impersonations of one imaginative genius in different poems, but in one "Myself" of the "Song."<sup>9</sup>

One of Rajasekhariah's designations is unfortunate. I do not understand why he refers to the persona as "the animal of sex"; and it remains to be seen whether his other designations are accurate. Rajasekhariah sums up the persona as follows:

"Song of Myself" is the revelation of the "Many-in-One," of the multiple selves of the Supreme, the Universal Man, the man of Manhattan, the poet of America, and the philosopher of mankind, out of which Whitman's "Myself" was compounded.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the contentions of the critics should be dispensed with at this point. It has already been established (in Chapter 1) that most critics agree that the "I" of "Song of Myself" is not the historical Walt Whitman and should not be construed as such. Therefore, Rajasekhariah is in error when he refers to the persona as the "autobiographical man."

Neither is the persona the "animal of sex" that Rajasekhariah refers to. Such lines as "I will go to

<sup>9</sup> Rajasekhariah, p. 307.

<sup>10</sup> Rajasekhariah, p. 387.

the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,  
 / I am mad for it to be in contact with me," (ll. 11-  
 12) do not support such a reading. Nor does the line,  
 "I believe in the flesh and the appetites," support  
 such a reading.

The designation, "animal of sex" is too emotive.  
 Certainly there are plenty of sexual allusions in "Song  
 of Myself," but I do not think that it is accurate to  
 characterize the persona as an "animal of sex." Even  
 Mathew's designation of the persona as a "person with  
 extraordinary sexual appetite"<sup>11</sup> is a dubious one.  
 However, the persona is extremely sensitive to the  
 physical:

Mine is no callous shell,  
 I have instant conductors all over  
     me whether I pass or stop,  
 They seize every object and lead it  
     harmlessly through me.

I merely stir, press, feel with my  
     fingers and am happy,  
 To touch my person to some one else's  
     is about as much as I can stand.  
 (ll. 613-17)

What is less or more than a touch?  
 (l. 651)

<sup>11</sup> V. John Mathew, "Self in 'Song of Myself': A  
 Defense of Whitman's Egoism," The Walt Whitman Review,  
 15, No. 2 (June 1969), 104.

But the persona is as sensitive to the divine as he is to the physical:

I hear and behold God in every  
object, yet I understand God not  
in the least, . . . (l. 1274)

I see something of God each hour of the  
twenty-four, and each moment then,  
In the faces of men and women I see God,  
and in my own face in the glass;  
I find letters from God dropped in the  
street, and every one is signed by  
God's name. (ll. 1277-79)

The persona is not an "animal of sex"; nor is he a "person with extraordinary sexual appetite." He feels equally comfortable with both his sexual feelings and his intimations of immortality. "Copulation is no more rank to me than death is," (l. 523), he sings.

The persona of "Song of Myself" may be understood as one self made up of a number of sub-selves. The problem lies in the critics' failure to realize that when they attempt to describe the self of the persona as many selves, they are actually describing the apparent selves as opposed to the real self of the persona. For the apparent self is the self as it is perceived by others. And there are as many interpretations of those selves as there are critics.

The self of the persona is unquestionably protean; the persona does assume identities, and he does miraculously change from individual to universal, from



personal to generic, and from sexual being to divine being, but the metamorphoses he undergoes are imaginative. The imagination is the activator of the changes in the persona's self. His real self remains constant. The real self of the persona is "large" and "contain[s] multitudes" (l. 1316). The real self contains any number of sub-selves. It can contain everything because it is a microcosm of the universe.

Several critics, who have been mystified by the all-inclusive nature of the persona, have resolved their mystification by labeling the persona a mystic. Mathew writes,

Whitman's auto-eroticism, sexuality, materialism, love of sensations, his acceptance of life and death, and all other polarities, and his enigmatic assertion that he is God himself, all may be understood and appreciated only if we understand that these are the utterance of a mystic for whom there is no opposition between body and soul, man and God, heaven and earth, and good and evil.<sup>12</sup>

This conceiving of the persona as mystic is a nice, neat, tidy explanation of the persona that apparently resolves all the problems other critics have perceived as barriers to understanding. For the mystic self can

<sup>12</sup> Mathew, p. 107.

be and do anything and can contain everything. There is no contradiction or inconsistency that cannot be explained by understanding the persona as mystic self.

What is a mystic? Mathew explains:

The real mystic is one who has found out that he and God are one, that heaven and earth are one, and that there is no conflict whatsoever between body and soul and spirit and matter, at least according to oriental thinking, to be more specific, according to Hindu cosmology.<sup>13</sup>

Acceptance of the view of the persona as mystic self, resolves most of the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies that have confused and perplexed so many critics.

James E. Miller, Jr., believes that the poem is a "dramatic representation of a mystical experience."<sup>14</sup> Chari writes,

Mysticism . . . as it finds expression in Whitman, is a way of embracing the "other"--the objective world--in an inclusive conception of self. In other words, it is a way of finding the world in the self and as the self, thus

<sup>13</sup> Mathew, pp. 105-106.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass, p. 6.

negating the opposition of the me  
and the not-me.<sup>15</sup>

Chari goes on to explain American mysticism as follows:

the American transcendentalists,  
under the influence of Neo-Platonic  
and Hindu ideas, conceived a mystical  
doctrine of intuition or unitary  
vision that is genuinely "transcendental" in that it is above the dualism  
inherent in rational thinking. Such a  
belief in a mystical consciousness is  
at the root of Whitman's thought and  
can be seen operating throughout his  
poetry.<sup>16</sup>

What Chari refers to as mystical consciousness  
Bucke calls "cosmic consciousness," which he defines  
as "a higher form of consciousness than that possessed  
by the ordinary man."<sup>17</sup> Bucke explains that there are  
three kinds of consciousness:

(1) Simple Consciousness, which is  
possessed by . . . the upper half of  
the animal kingdom. By means of this  
faculty a dog or a horse is just as  
conscious of his own limbs and body  
and he knows that these are a part of  
himself. (2) Over and above this Simple  
Consciousness, which is possessed by

<sup>15</sup> Chari, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Chari, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Maurice Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness  
(New York: Causeway Books, facsimile of original  
1900 edition, 1974), p. 1

man as by animals, man has another called Self Consciousness. By virtue of this faculty man . . . becomes conscious of himself as a distinct entity apart from all the rest of the universe. . . . Cosmic consciousness is a third form which is as far above Self Consciousness as is that above Simple Consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

The rare individual who possesses cosmic consciousness has an awareness of the cosmos along with "an intellectual enlightenment or illumination which alone would place the individual on a new plane of existence," Bucke writes.<sup>19</sup>

How is the universe viewed by one who has cosmic consciousness? Bucke answers,

This consciousness shows the cosmos to consist not of dead matter governed by unconscious, rigid, and unintending law; it shows it on the contrary as entirely immaterial, entirely spiritual, and entirely alive; it shows that death is an absurdity, that every one and everything has eternal life; it shows that the universe is God and that God is the universe, and that no evil ever did or will ever enter into it; a great deal of this is, of course, from the point of view of self consciousness, absurd--it is nevertheless undoubtedly true.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Bucke, pp. 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Bucke, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Bucke, p. 14.

The persona as mystic self feels at one with his environment and cannot refrain from identifying with other people as well as with the world, the solar system, the cosmos. He is the "indivisible self and is at once the actor, action, and the instruments of action."<sup>21</sup>

The protean nature of the persona can be accounted for by understanding the persona as a mystic who is capable of assuming a number of different identities. Such a persona intuitively feels the nature of the cosmos through his experiences, by assuming a number of different masks in different sections of the poem: poet, teacher, superman, God, narcissist, kosmos. "We hear in one mouth many different voices," Rajasekhariah writes, "and he chants his songs in all these discordant identities simply because he is all these at once."<sup>22</sup>

In the following lines, the persona completely identifies with two of the "others" in Section 33:

I turn the bridegroom out of bed  
and stay with the bride myself,  
And tighten her all night to my  
thighs and lips.

My voice is the wife's voice, the

<sup>21</sup> Chari, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> Rajasekhariah, p. 310.

screech by the rail of the stairs,  
They fetch my man's body up dripping  
and drowned. (ll. 814-17)

The above lines demonstrate the protean nature of persona, who not only identifies with the bridegroom in the passage, but also with the bride. The persona becomes both bridegroom and bride--a physical but not an imaginative impossibility--not for an all-inclusive persona.

The persona so completely identifies with other people that he imaginatively transforms or metamorphoses himself into them. "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels....I myself become the wounded person, / My hurt turns livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe" (ll. 841-42). Again and again, he merges his identity with another:

I become any presence or truth of  
humanity here,  
And see myself in prison shaped like  
another man,  
And feel the dull unintermitted pain.

For me the keepers of convicts shoulder  
their carbines and keep watch,  
It is I let out in the morning and  
barred at night. (ll. 941-45)

The persona is also the social man:

This is the city....and I am one of  
the citizens;  
Whatever interests the rest interests

me....politics, churches, news-  
papers, schools,  
Benevolent societies, improvements,  
banks, tariffs, steamships, factories,  
markets,  
Stocks and stores and real estate and  
personal estate. (ll. 1070-73)

Even as a private citizen, the persona acknowledges his  
congruence with other citizens:

They who piddle and patter here in  
collars and tailed coats....I am  
aware who they are....and that they  
are not worms or fleas,  
I acknowledge the duplicates of myself  
under all the scrape-lipped and  
pipe-legged concealments. (ll. 1074-75)

The persona is also a teacher:

I am the teacher of athletes,  
He that by me spreads a wider breast  
than my own proves the width of  
my own,  
He most honors my style who learns  
under it to destroy the teacher.  
(ll. 1231-33)

He is a creator:

Magnifying and applying come I,  
Outbidding at the start the old cautious  
hucksters,  
The most they offer for mankind and  
eternity less than a spirt of my  
own seminal wet,  
Taking myself the exact dimensions  
of Jehovah and laying them away  
(ll. 1020-23)

He is cosmic:

I open my scuttle at night and see  
the far-sprinkled systems,  
And all I see, multiplied as high as  
I can cipher, edge but the rim of  
the farther systems.

Wider and wider they speak, expanding  
and always expanding,  
Outward and outward and forever outward.  
(ll. 1182-85)

He is a wanderer:

I tramp a perpetual journey,  
My signs are a rain-proof coat and  
good shoes and a staff cut from  
the woods; . . . (ll. 1199-1200)

Shoulder your duds, and I will mine,  
and let us hasten forth;  
Wonderful cities and free nations we  
shall fetch as we go.  
If you tire, give me both burdens, and  
rest the chuff of your hand on my  
hip,  
And in due time you shall repay the  
same service to me;  
For after we start we never lie by  
again. (ll. 1212-16)

He is narcissistic:

I dote on myself....there is that lot  
of me, and all so luscious,  
Each moment and whatever happens thrills  
me with joy. (ll. 545-46)

Clearly, the text substantiates a reading of the  
persona of "Song of Myself" as protean. He is a poet,  
a sensual man, a social man, a private citizen, a



wanderer, a teacher, a creator, a superman, a God, a kosmos, and a mystic.

Fein concludes, however, that "there is no one Final, True Self . . . Whitman's great drama is the drama of the mutable self."<sup>23</sup> And what is the mutable self, if not the protean self? Cook concludes that the persona is a kosmos, and has "a unity and identity with the universe in all its forms."<sup>24</sup> And what is a kosmos, if it is not the mystic self?

The protean nature of the persona of "Song of Myself" has been demonstrated and established. It has also been argued that the self of the persona is protean precisely because it is a mystic or all-inclusive self that embraces everything. It is an intuitive rather than a logical self. It is solitary at the same time it is multi-dimensional, diffuse, and mutable--in a word, protean.

There are many sub-selves or apparent selves within the real self of the persona, but there is only one real self, only one "I" in the poem. That "I" is a literary fiction, a device that symbolizes the man, Walt Whitman. But the "I" is not Walt Whitman, it is

<sup>23</sup> Fein, pp. 48-49.

<sup>24</sup> Cook, p. 7.

a complex persona that is man, poet, kosmos, God, superman, teacher, citizen, narcissist, American, and supreme empathizer.

All of the different identities tend to obfuscate rather than clarify, however. The poem has no unity of time, place, or action. What is desirable is a theory of the persona that could unify the poem, that could compensate for the lack of unity in time, place, and action. Such a theory will be presented in Chapter V, following a discussion of the cosmology and cosmic metaphors in "Song of Myself" in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE COSMOS IN "SONG OF MYSELF"

The universe as it is presented in "Song of Myself" is cosmic: it is dynamic, orderly, harmonious, limitless and infinite. James E. Miller, Jr., writes,

The earth frequently appears . . . as a great round globe sailing through the heavens. This perspective serves to project both poet and reader into the universe as cosmic observers witnessing the dramatic progression of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

Rajasekhariah describes the cosmic vision of the persona in terms reminiscent of Emerson's "transparent eyeball." He writes,

The "I" of Leaves of Grass or the eye with which Whitman sees himself and the world--and, as he sees, presents them to our sight--is a strange contraption that combines a telescopic lens that perceives distance and a microscopic lens that sees minuteness.<sup>2</sup>

The microscopic-telescopic vision Rajasekhariah mentions

<sup>1</sup> James E. Miller, Jr., Walt Whitman (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1962), p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Rajasekhariah, p. 308.

is evident in the line "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars" (l. 662) and is a confirmation of the attention the persona pays to both the terrestrial world and the extra-terrestrial.

Throughout the poem, the persona does not limit his attention solely to the terrestrial world; his world-view contains a vision of the cosmos as well as of the earth. He refers to the earth, the stars, and their "adjuncts" (l. 126). He sings of the suns he can see--the stars visible from the earth--and of the suns he cannot see--the stars in distant galaxies (l. 351).

Smuts describes the physical world and the universe of "Song of Myself" as a "cosmic survey."<sup>3</sup> Nelson calls the poem a "cosmographic view of the processes of life,"<sup>4</sup> and Allen states that "the poet's voluptuous love-affair with his physical world makes him truly a cosmic poet. His strongest and most vivid images evoke cosmic connotations."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Jan Christian Smuts, Walt Whitman: A Study in the Evolution of Personality (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Nelson, "Whitman's Dynamic Form: The Image of the Divine," The Walt Whitman Review, 20, No. 4 (December 1974), 125.

<sup>5</sup> Gay Wilson Allen, Walt Whitman as Man, Poet and Legend with a Checklist of Whitman Publications 1945-1960 by Evie Allison Allen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), p. 76.

In this chapter the cosmic vision or perspective of "Song of Myself" will be discussed and evaluated in light of the literary scholarship and the text. Such an analysis of the cosmic metaphors in the poem is a pre-requisite to understanding the cosmic nature of the persona, a topic that will be treated fully in Chapter V.

At the beginning of the poem, a cosmic perspective is suggested. When the persona proclaims that "every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you," (l. 3) it becomes evident that the conceptualization of the universe held by the persona is extraordinary. The conceptualization is wholistic rather than atomistic, for the atoms making up the persona do not belong to him exclusively; they also belong to the readers of the poem, and by inference, to all.

The persona next tells his readers that if they stop with him they "shall possess the origin of all poems"; they "shall possess the good of the earth and sun....there are millions of suns left" (ll. 25-26). The universe revealed in these lines is infinite, limitless, unending. The persona continues his description, as follows:

I do not talk of the beginning or the  
end.  
There was never any more inception than

there is now, . . . (ll. 31-32)

And will never be any more perfection  
than there is now. (l. 34)

The universe is harmonious; it contains "the perfect fitness and equanimity of things" (l. 48), "the earth [is] good, and the stars good, and their adjuncts [are] all good" (l. 126).

At times the persona physically transcends the earth:

[He] travels with the speed of a  
dream over the earth, embracing  
all he sees by his voluptuous  
sight, and even beyond the earth;  
walking in space "with the tender  
and growing night." (sec. 21)

The persona becomes a "world" (l. 416) revolving around an "orbit" (l. 407) where "the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow" (l. 404).

The lines quoted so far establish that the persona of "Song of Myself" has an unusual awareness of and sensitivity to his environment. Characteristically, the persona's super-sensitivity is dualistic: he is extremely sensitive to his physical, sensual self as well as to the "limitless dynamics of the cosmos."<sup>6</sup> What accounts for the persona's dual consciousness, his

<sup>6</sup> Nelson, p. 126.

consciousness of himself as both physical being and cosmic being?

Mark Van Doren writes that Whitman was "erethistic": he was "one of those persons whose organs and tissues are chronically in a state of abnormal excitement, who tremble and quiver when the rest of us are merely conscious."<sup>7</sup> This explanation may be applied, by inference, to the persona of "Song of Myself," who in Section 2 is "mad" to be in contact with the atmosphere, who in Section 22 says to the sea, "I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers, / I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me," who calls himself "disorderly fleshly and sensual" in Section 24, who says in Section 27, "I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop, / They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me . . . / To touch my person to someone else's is about as much as I can stand," and who asks the question, "What is less or more than a touch?" in Section 30.

The persona's erethism, however, extends beyond the mere physical and sensual. He is also acutely

<sup>7</sup> Mark Van Doren, in David Daiches, "Walt Whitman: Impressionist Prophet," in Milton Hindus, ed., Leaves of Grass One Hundred Years After (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), p. 111.

receptive to the cosmos. What explains his cosmic consciousness? Many critics believe the persona's cosmic consciousness is the result of a mystical experience that is dramatized in Section 5. The passage follows:

I believe in you my soul....the other  
 I am must not abase itself to you,  
 And you must not be abased to the  
 other.

Loafe with me on the grass....loose the  
 stop from your throat,  
 Not words, not music or rhyme I want....  
 not custom or lecture, not even the  
 best,  
 Only the lull I like, the hum of your  
 valved voice.

I mind how we lay in June, such a  
 transparent summer morning;  
 You settled your head athwart my hips  
 and gently turned over on me,  
 And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone,  
 and plunged your tongue to my bare-  
 stript heart,  
 And reached till you felt my beard, and  
 reached till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the  
 peace and joy of knowledge that pass  
 all the art and argument of the  
 earth;  
 And I know that the spirit of God is  
 the eldest brother of my own,  
 And that all the men ever born are  
 also my brothers....and the women  
 my sisters and lovers,  
 And that a kelson of the creation is  
 love. (ll. 73-86)

Both James E. Miller, Jr., and Bucke read the above passage as an awakening of the cosmic self. Miller



writes,

"Song of Myself" represents an awakening of the self, a coming to consciousness for the first time of the real meaning of being alive and in the flesh, of seeing and hearing, of tasting and feeling. This awakening of consciousness penetrates beyond the senses. It dives deep within and it soars far beyond; and it discovers secrets and uncovers mysteries--the eternity and infinity of the self, the glories of the body and soul, the completion of life through death.<sup>8</sup>

The "awakening" Miller refers to is an awakening of cosmic consciousness.

In Bucke's reading of the mystical experience in Section 5, the "other I am" is the persona's old self, and the "you" in the passage is the persona's new, cosmic self. Bucke writes,

The illumination (or whatever it was) came to him or upon him one June morning, and took (though gently) absolute possession of him, at least for the time. Henceforth, he says, his life received its inspiration from the newcomer, the new self, whose tongue, as he expresses it, was plunged to his bare-stripped heart. His outward life, also, became subject to the dictation of the new self--it held his feet.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Miller, Walt Whitman, p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> Bucke, p. 188.

Although the quotation above refers to Whitman, it may also apply to the persona of "Song of Myself." Many critics have commented on the illumination of the persona which takes place in the passage.

Carlisle refers to the persona's experience in Section 5 as "consciousness-expanding."<sup>10</sup> James E. Miller, Jr. defines cosmic consciousness as "the capacity of the individual consciousness to experience a sense of total unity with all Nature, or the universe."<sup>11</sup> Bucke explains what happens to a person who enters into a state of cosmic consciousness:

He knows without learning (from the mere fact of illumination) certain things . . . for instance: (1) that the universe is not a dead machine but a living presence; (2) that in its essence and tendency it is infinitely good; (3) that individual existence is continuous beyond what is called death.<sup>12</sup>

The abundance of cosmic metaphors in "Song of Myself" confirms the possession of a cosmic vision or

<sup>10</sup> Carlisle, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> James E. Miller, Jr., Karl Shapiro, and Bernice Slote, Start With the Sun: Studies in Cosmic Poetry (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Bucke, p. 63.

cosmic consciousness by the persona. A close look at some of the passages in which the cosmic metaphors occur should provide additional evidence of cosmic consciousness. In Sections 24 and 25, the persona alludes to the cosmos:

To behold the daybreak!  
The little light fades the immense  
    and diaphanous shadows,  
The air tastes good to my palate.

Hefts of the moving world at innocent  
    gambols, silently rising, freshly  
    exuding,  
Scooting obliquely high and low.

The earth by the sky staid with....the  
    daily close of their junction,  
The heaved challenge from the east that  
    moment over my head,  
The mocking taunt, See then whether you  
    shall be master!

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the  
    sunrise would kill me,  
If I could not now and always send sunrise  
    out of me.

We also ascend dazzling and tremendous  
    as the sun,  
We found our own my soul in the calm and  
    cool of the daybreak. (ll. 552-65)

In the above passage, the persona compares himself to the sun (the "we" refers to the dualistic self of the persona: his body and soul). The persona can send the sunrise out of himself "now and always" because of his conception of himself as a world ("I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds"--l. 567). The metaphor

is mixed; the simile implies a comparison with the sun, but the persona confesses that if he were not larger than the sun, the sunrise would kill him. He is like the sun but larger--large enough to reflect the sunrise rather than to be absorbed by it.

Allen notes a cosmic insight or vision in Section 27. He writes,

In section 27 the poet asks, "To be in any form, what is that?" Then he answers the how rather than the what. "Round and round we go, all of us, and ever come back thither"; every existence is fated to tread the round of birth, growth, death--and rebirth ("and ever come back thither"). This is the great insight (vision) of the poet in "Song of Myself." <sup>13</sup>

Bucke explains that the possessor of cosmic consciousness holds the following view of life and death:

Men . . . are in reality specks of relative death in an infinite ocean of life . . . The life which is in man is eternal, as all life is eternal . . . the soul of man is as immortal as God . . . the foundation principle of the world is what we call love, and . . . the happiness of every individual is in the long run absolutely certain.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Allen, A Reader's Guide, p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> Bucke, p. 61.

James E. Miller, Jr., writes that the "unfolding cosmic scheme of 'Song of Myself' shrinks not just man but his solar system into microscopic specks by its order and complexly intricate interrelationships."<sup>15</sup>

Both Miller and Bucke agree that, from a cosmic perspective, man is nothing more than a "speck," and there are a number of passages containing cosmic metaphors that accord with their contention. In Section 33, the persona casts off his "ballasts," rises in the air like a balloon and miraculously changes into a comet racing through outer space:

Speeding through space....  
     speeding through heaven and the  
     stars,  
 Speeding amid the seven satellites  
     and the broad ring and the diameter  
     of eighty thousand miles,  
 Speeding with tailed meteors....  
     throwing fireballs like the  
     rest . . . (ll. 790-92)

Backing and filling, appearing and  
     disappearing,  
 I tread day and night such roads.

I visit the orchards of God and look  
     at the spheric product,  
 And look at quintillions ripened, and  
     look at quintillions green.  
     (ll. 795-98)

<sup>15</sup> Miller, Walt Whitman, p. 125.

There is no contradiction in the persona's description of himself as a "world" and in the critics' description of him as a "speck." He is both, a "world" and a "speck," for the world (or earth) is nothing more than a mote in the great void, a speck in the cosmos. The persona becomes a comet in the above passage and flies to Saturn "speeding amid the seven satellites," and "throwing fire-balls like the rest."

The person then descends to the stratosphere, describing the earth as if he were observing it from an airplane:

Through the clear atmosphere I  
 stretch around on the wonderful  
 beauty,  
 The enormous masses of ice pass me  
 and I pass them....  
 The white-topped mountains point up in  
 the distance....I fling out my fan-  
 cies toward them;  
 We are about approaching some great  
 battlefield in which we are soon  
 to be engaged,  
 We pass the colossal outposts of the  
 encampment....we pass with still  
 feet and caution;  
 Or we are entering by the suburbs some  
 vast and ruined city....the blocks  
 and fallen architecture more than  
 all the living cities of the globe.  
 (11. 807-12)

Later, in Section 40, the persona challenges the sun.  
 "Flaunt of the sunshine I need not your bask....lie

over, / You light surfaces only....I force the surfaces and the depths also," (ll. 984-85) he says.

The sense of cosmic consciousness suffuses the persona's religious beliefs, which are delineated in Section 43, as follows:

My faith is the greatest of faiths and  
 the least of faiths,  
 Enclosing all worship ancient and modern,  
 and all between ancient and modern,  
 Believing I shall come again upon the  
 earth after five thousand years,  
 Waiting responses from oracles....  
 honoring the gods....saluting the  
 sun,  
 Making a fetish of the first rock or  
 stump....powowing with sticks in  
 the circle of obis,  
 Helping the lama or brahmin as he trims  
 the lamps of the idols,  
 Dancing yet through the streets in a  
 phallic procession....rapt and austere  
 in the woods, a gymnosophist,  
 Drinking mead from the skull-cap....to  
 shasta and vedas admirant....minding  
 the koran,  
 Walking the teokallis, spotted with gore  
 from the stone and knife--beating the  
 serpent-skin drum;  
 Accepting the gospels, accepting him that  
 was crucified, knowing assuredly that  
 he is divine,  
 To the mass kneeling--to the puritan's  
 prayer rising--sitting patiently in  
 a pew,  
 Ranting and frothing in my insane crisis  
 --waiting dead-like till my spirit  
 arouses me,  
 Looking forth on pavement and land, and  
 outside of pavement and land,  
 Belonging to the winders of the circuit  
 of circuits. (ll. 1093-1106)

The religious philosophy in the above passage is curious and unorthodox to say the least. The persona certainly is not professing any recognizable form of Christian theology. He appears to be accepting the tenets and practices of every religion or pseudo-religion that ever existed or that still exists in the world. He is proclaiming himself as a messiah ("Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years"). His religion (if the word is accurate) is polytheistic rather than monotheistic ("honoring the gods"), and it is naturalistic ("saluting the sun") as well as spiritualistic ("accepting the gospels . . . knowing assuredly that he is divine").

Bucke explains the effect that cosmic consciousness has on traditional religious beliefs. He writes,

In contact with the flux of cosmic consciousness all religions known and named to-day [sic] will be melted down . . . Churches, priests, forms, creeds, prayers, all agents, all intermediaries between the individual man and God will be permanently replaced by direct unmistakable intercourse. Men will not worry about death or a future, about the kingdom of heaven, about what may come with and after the cessation of the life of the present body. Each soul will feel and know itself to be immortal,



will feel and know that the entire  
universe with all its good and with  
all its beauty is for it and belongs  
to it forever.<sup>16</sup>

The poetic rendering of the persona's religious philosophy can clearly be read as having been influenced by cosmic consciousness. The persona's religion encompasses all religions, as if all had been "melted down" into one, all-inclusive religion. Life after death is not an issue of concern for the persona, who says, "I do not know what is untried and afterward, / But I know it is sure and alive and sufficient" (ll. 1120-1121). Whatever comes after death cannot fail a single person, he believes ("Each who passes is considered, and each who stops is considered, and not a single one can it fail"--l. 1121).

Shifting from an ordinary perspective into a cosmic perspective, the persona says that "what is untried and afterward" cannot fail

. . . anything in the earth, or down  
in the oldest graves of the earth,  
Nor anything in the myriads of spheres,  
nor one of the myriads of myriads  
that inhabit them,  
Nor the present, nor the least wisp  
that is known. (ll. 1130-32)

<sup>16</sup> Bucke, p. 4.

From the persona's perspective, the universe contains "myriads of myriads" of "spheres," which he has become aware of by looking through his telescopic eye. The perspective abruptly shifts again, however, and the persona looks through his microscopic eye at "the least wisp that is known." Characteristically, the persona's cosmic vision includes the smallest as well as the largest elements in the universe. It includes the "atom" in Section 1 and the "world" in Section 20; it includes the "spear of summer grass" (Section 1) and "the journey-work of the stars" (Section 31); and it includes the "embryo" and the "nebula" of Section 44.

The persona has a sense of the timelessness of eternity:

The clock indicates the moment....  
but what does eternity indicate?

Eternity lies in bottomless reservoirs  
....its buckets are rising forever  
and ever,  
They pour and they pour and they exhale  
away.

We have thus far exhausted trillions of  
winters and summers;  
There are trillions ahead, and trillions  
ahead of them. (ll. 1135-39)

He perceives the history of mankind as evolutionary:

My feet strike an apex of the apices  
 of the stairs,  
 On every step bunches of ages, and  
 larger bunches between the steps,  
 All below duly traveled--and still I  
 mount and mount. (ll. 1149-51)

The long, slow, evolutionary process involved the cosmos:

Immense have been the preparations  
 for me,  
 Faithful and friendly the arms that  
 have helped me.

Cycles ferried by cradle, rowing and  
 rowing like cheerful boatmen;  
 For room to me stars kept aside in  
 their own rings,  
 They sent influences to look after  
 what was to hold me. (ll. 1158-62)

What kind of influence the stars had on the evolutionary development of the persona is difficult to infer from the above passage, but the persona clearly communicates the idea that they were one of many influences, as he points out in the line, "All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me, / Now I stand on this spot with my soul" (ll. 1167-68).

The persona's cosmic vision is evident in the following passage:

I open my scuttle at night and see  
 the far-sprinkled systems,  
 And all I see, multiplied as high as  
 I can cipher, edge but the rim of  
 the farther systems.

Wider and wider they spread, ex-  
 panding and always expanding,  
 Outward and outward and forever  
 outward.

My sun has his sun, and round him  
 obediently wheels,  
 He joins with his partners a group  
 of superior circuit,  
 And greater sets to follow, making  
 specks of the greatest inside  
 them. (ll. 1182-88)

At this juncture the "specks" apparently are the galaxies that are contained within the solar system. The cosmic metaphors here are imaginatively and lyrically expansive, confirming Allen's view that the poet's "most lyrical identifications are with the cosmic and life-forces."<sup>17</sup> Nelson writes that Whitman "inflates his apparently aimless catalogues into a cosmographical vision that embraces the totality of the universe."<sup>18</sup>

In Section 49, the persona speaks of the cosmic process:

I hear you whispering there O stars  
 of heaven,  
 O suns....O grass of graves....O  
 perpetual transfers and promotions  
 ....if you do not say anything how  
 can I say anything? . . . (ll. 1290-91)

<sup>17</sup> Allen, Walt Whitman, p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> Nelson, p. 125.

I ascend from the moon....I ascend  
from the night . . . (l. 1296)

The "perpetual transfers and promotions" are the cosmic process, the endlessly unfolding and unceasing ebb and flow of the universe. The cosmos includes the stars, the suns, the grass, and the process itself. Allen writes,

On the cosmic level [the personal] intuitively his identity in the evolution of the stars, the origin of life, and the beauty of all elemental things. . . . In his cosmical metamorphosis he devours time and space, skirts sierras, covers continents with his palms, and, in a burst of acceleration and dilation, speeds "with tailed meteors....throwing fire-balls like the rest"; finally he departs "as air," shaking his white locks "at the runaway sun," effusing his "flesh in eddies" and drifting "it in lacy jags."<sup>19</sup>

In the final cosmic metamorphosis (Section 52) the persona becomes a comet once again (cf. Section 33), but this time he burns himself up, consuming himself in flight in the following passage:<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Allen, "Mutations in Whitman's Art," in A. Golden, ed., Walt Whitman: A Collection of Criticism (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1974), pp. 39-40.

<sup>20</sup> Allen, Rideout, and Robinson, p. 1230.

The last scud of day holds back for  
     me,  
 It flings my likeness after the rest  
     and true as any on the shadowed  
     wilds,  
 It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.  
  
 I depart as air....I shake my white  
     locks at the runaway sun,  
 I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift  
     it in lacy jags. (ll. 1324-28)

In this chapter the nature of the universe, as it is perceived by a persona with an acute sense of the cosmos, has been discussed. That acute sense of the cosmos, which I have called the cosmic perspective, has been referred to by other critics as the cosmographic or cosmic vision, the cosmic insight, and as cosmic consciousness. It has been demonstrated through an analysis and exegesis of key passages and metaphors in the poem and by reference to the scholarship that the persona's conceptualization of the cosmos is all-inclusive: it contains the smallest particles of matter (atoms) as well as the largest (myriads of spheres); in other words, it contains everything.

In Chapter V it will be argued that not only is the universe in "Song of Myself" cosmic, but so is the persona. It will be demonstrated that the persona is a kosmos--a microcosm of the cosmos, and it will be argued that the conceptualization of the persona as a kosmos is the central metaphor and key unifying device

in the poem.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PERSONA AS KOSMOS

In the preceding chapter, the cosmos of "Song of Myself" was discussed, and the persona's cosmic perspective was described. The relevant passages in the poem were cited, and the critical scholarship was presented and evaluated. The focus was on the cosmos as it is perceived and described by the persona of the poem. The focal point of this chapter, however, is the persona as a metaphor for the cosmos. The idea of the persona as "kosmos" will be presented and treated at length by reference to the text of the poem and to the literary scholarship regarding this point.

The term "kosmos" caused a good deal of consternation among the earliest reviewers of Leaves of Grass. The term was unfamiliar, and in 1856 an anonymous reviewer tried to make sense of it in the following manner:

If being a Kosmos is to set no limits to one's imagination; to use coarse epithets when coarseness is not needful; to roam like a drunken satyr, with inflamed blood, through every field of lascivious thought; to return time after time with seemingly



exhaustless prurient pleasure  
 to the same licentious phrases and  
 ideas, and to jumble all this up  
 with bits of marvelously beautiful  
 description, exquisite touches of  
 nature, fragments of savagely-uttered  
 truth, shreds of unleavened philoso-  
 phy; if to do all this is to be a  
 Kosmos, then indeed we cede to Mr.  
 WALT WHITMAN [sic] his arrogant title.<sup>1</sup>

The above definition of "kosmos" not only is idiosyn-  
 cratic, but it also fails to define the term in a  
 sensible and precise manner.

The term continued to vex critics for many years.  
 In 1938 Strauch wrote,

All students of Whitman know how  
 this audacious term aroused disgust  
 or tickled easily tickled risibili-  
 ties in various quarters when Leaves  
of Grass was reviewed. But Whitman  
 certainly had a right to the word.  
 Its occurrence is well timed, for it  
 comes immediately after the long  
 catalogue of mystical interpenetration  
 and constitutes another definition of  
 the Self. The word could not have  
 been very well understood had it  
 occurred earlier in the poem; but  
 there was no reason for delaying its  
 use beyond this point or for not  
 employing it at all; it fits admirably  
 into the scheme of the poem in the  
 position it occupied. So well calcu-  
 lated is the artistic and philosophic

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous 1856 review of Leaves of Grass in  
 Gay Wilson Allen, ed., Studies in Leaves of Grass  
 (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.,  
 1972), p. 5.

justness of the word that the cavil  
of earlier critics must be set down  
as stupid.<sup>2</sup>

Strauch's assertion that the term is another definition of the self is correct. The first and only use of the term in "Song of Myself" is in Section 24, where the poet describes himself as "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos" (l. 499).

However, Strauch does not clarify the meaning of the term, and later critics have disagreed as to what the term means. For example, Carlisle makes no distinction between "kosmos" and "cosmos," referring to the poet Whitman as a "cosmos."<sup>3</sup> Marinacci defines "kosmos" as follows:

A kosmos in the Whitman vocabulary was a wise, divinely inspired human being whose words and actions served as examples and inspirations to his fellow men. The name came from the Greek word for order and harmony, which was then applied to the universe itself.<sup>4</sup>

Marinacci's definition is an attempt to discriminate and differentiate between the terms, "kosmos," and

<sup>2</sup> Strauch, p. 600.

<sup>3</sup> Carlisle, p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Marinacci, O Wondrous Singer! An Introduction to Walt Whitman (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1970), p. 131.

"cosmos," but she fails to clarify the distinction in her assertion that the word "kosmos" was used later to refer to the universe.

Daiches defines kosmos as follows:

A kosmos, as Whitman uses the word, is the individual human being expanded through appropriate poetic devices to be a symbolic representative of all mankind.<sup>5</sup>

The above definition has the virtue of relating the term to the poetic persona, but its scope is narrow. A "kosmos" in Daiches' lexicon can symbolize mankind but nothing else.

Black asserts that the term signifies an American poet. He writes,

If anything could make him [Whitman] happy to stand on this spot with his soul, it is the sense that he has a name and a role to play: Walt Whitman, a Kosmos, an American bard.<sup>6</sup>

Black's definition is too circumscribed. The persona has already defined himself as a poet in Sections 21 and 22 before he describes himself as a "kosmos" in Section 24. To equate "kosmos" with American bard or poet is too limiting. Burroughs also understands

<sup>5</sup> Daiches, p. 111.

<sup>6</sup> Black, p. 115.

"kosmos" to be synonymous with poet. He writes, "Nature itself is the only perfect poem, and the Kosmos is the only great poet."<sup>7</sup>

If the foregoing definitions of "kosmos" as poet, as divinely inspired being, and as representative man are inadequate, how should the term be defined? Allen and Chari offer the best conceptualization of "kosmos." Allen writes,

Whitman calls . . . himself a "kosmos" (Whitman's preferred spelling), that is, a symbolical microcosm of the macrocosm. By the magic of sympathetic identification the symbolical "I" can range back and forth in time and space, thus in a sense annihilating time and space.<sup>8</sup>

Chari echoes Allen in the following quotation, writing that the persona

feels that he is identical with the universal movement outside. The cosmic being outside and the vivifying self within are realized as one and the same. For he who knows his "actual self"--the reality beneath his empirical being--knows himself to be the permeating essence of the cosmic existence outside, because his own self is the

<sup>7</sup> John Burroughs, Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1971), p. 40. First published 1867.

<sup>8</sup> Allen, Walt Whitman as Man, p. 38.

self of all, "every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." Thus Whitman comes to feel that he is himself the cosmic whole. He describes himself as "Walt Whitman, a Kosmos." He is "Self-conscious microcosmic." He will contain everything, even contradictions within himself.<sup>9</sup>

The definitions of "kosmos" above are, in my opinion, the most accurate and appropriate of all the critical definitions. In an article published in The Walt Whitman Review I extended the definition as follows:

The "kosmos" can be understood as being identical with the cosmos, but circumscribed within the persona: the persona or "kosmos" is the microcosm of the universe; the cosmos is the macrocosm.<sup>10</sup>

The persona as "kosmos" is the central metaphor of the poem, for it serves as a unifying device in a poem that has no recognizable unity of time, place, and action. The cosmic vision, the cosmic scope and breadth, and the cosmic insight in "Song of Myself" required an extraordinary persona--an unconventional

<sup>9</sup> Chari, p. 98.

<sup>10</sup> Ward Welty, "The Persona as Kosmos in 'Song of Myself,'" The Walt Whitman Review, 25, No. 3 (September 1979), 104.

and unorthodox persona that could be understood as "a felt presence, as an idea, and as a metaphor or conceit."<sup>11</sup> The idea of the persona as kosmos meets that requirement. By creating a persona who is a kosmos, Whitman was able to build unity into a poem that otherwise would have had none. There is no unity of action in "Song of Myself"; the action is episodic and fragmentary. One also looks in vain for the unities of time and place. Carlisle notes that "Whitman's images . . . dramatize his [the persona's] release from the limits of a realm or a particular place and from chronometric time."<sup>12</sup>

Both Chase and James E. Miller, Jr., comment upon the universality and timelessness of the persona in "Song of Myself." Chase writes that Whitman "would write a poem . . . and it would describe the self as a timeless universal continuum."<sup>13</sup> James E. Miller writes, "The self is sung . . . because of the . . . universal element in self; universal . . . truths are discovered through the universality that resides in in self."<sup>14</sup> How Whitman conceived and described the

<sup>11</sup> Chase, Walt Whitman Reconsidered, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Carlisle, p. 200.

<sup>13</sup> Chase, Walt Whitman Reconsidered, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, A Critical Guide, pp. 188-9.

persona as kosmos, as a microcosm of the infinite, eternal, dynamic and limitless cosmos is the subject of the following pages.

Although the persona of "Song of Myself" does not describe himself as a kosmos until Section 24 of the poem, the conceptualization is clear from the beginning:

I celebrate myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as  
good belongs to you. (ll. 1-3)

The persona's description of himself is cosmic. Chari explains that "the individual . . . himself is also the self of all. At the core of his being the individual is one with the cosmic whole."<sup>15</sup>

The persona may be read as ordinary in the first two lines of the poem, but he takes on a cosmic dimension at line three. Why do the persona's atoms belong not only to himself but to the poem's readers and by extension to everyone? The reason is "because his own self is the self of all."<sup>16</sup> Blasing explains that "this concept of being everyone and no one validates

<sup>15</sup> Chari, p. 127.

<sup>16</sup> Chari, p. 98.

Whitman's cosmic persona: by relinquishing his identity, one man can live and contain the history of the universe."<sup>17</sup>

In Section 7, the idea of the persona as kosmos is continued:

I pass death with the dying, and  
 birth with the new-washed babe....  
 and am not contained between my  
 hat and boots . . . (l. 124)

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of  
 an earth,  
 I am the mate and companion of people,  
 all just as immortal and fathomless  
 as myself;  
 They do not know how immortal, but I know.  
 (ll. 127-29)

The persona is not contained between his hat and boots because he transcends the physical body and, like the cosmos, exists eternally. His identity is transcendent; therefore, he can be mate and companion to all people, and he can refer to them as immortal and fathomless as himself.

When the persona asks the question, "Who need be afraid of the merge?" (l. 113) he is referring to the cosmos. Literally, the merge is a medium that wholly surrounds or absorbs. The persona answers the

<sup>17</sup> Mutlu Blasing, "'The Sleepers': The Problem of the Self in Whitman," The Walt Whitman Review, 21, No. 3 (September 1979), 112.



rhetorical question: he is "around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless....and can never be shaken away"; therefore, there is no need to be afraid. He is a part of the merge and will always remain a part of it because his identity is cosmic, rather than personal or physical. Blasing writes,

Since personal identity exists in time as sequence and in determinate space the persona--in transcending his identity--transcends time and space as well, for he is no longer bound by their limitations.<sup>18</sup>

In Section 8, the persona sings, "I mind them or the resonance of them....I come again and again" (l. 159). The persona is referring to the brief catalogue of people preceding the statement. The persona can come again and again because he is not circumscribed by time. He can pay attention to the people mentioned in the catalogue or to the "resonance of them," which I take to mean their souls (Whitman first uses sound imagery in Section 5 when he alludes to his soul: "Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice," l. 77).

In Section 16, the persona describes himself as

<sup>18</sup> Blasing, p. 114.

follows:

I am of old and young, of the foolish  
as much as the wise,  
Regardless of others, ever regardful  
of others,  
Maternal as well as paternal, a child  
as well as a man,  
Stuffed with the stuff that is coarse,  
and stuffed with the stuff that is  
fine. (ll. 326-28)

He then shifts from a generic description to a cosmic  
one:

I resist anything better than my own  
diversity,  
And breathe the air and leave plenty  
after me,  
And am not stuck up, and am in my place.  
(ll. 347-49)

The persona as kosmos is an epitome of diversity. In Section 32 he calls himself "omnigenous," a perfect adjective to use to describe the persona's cosmic conceptualization of himself. The homogeneous self is made up of like elements; the heterogeneous self is composed of unlike elements; but the omnigenous self contains everything. Only a kosmos, a man like the kosmos, could be omnigenous.

The cosmic description of the kosmos continues:

And I know I am solid and sound,  
To me the converging objects of the  
universe perpetually flow  
(ll. 402-3)

And I know I am deathless,  
 I know this orbit of mine cannot  
     be swept by a carpenter's compass  
 (l. 407)

One world is aware, and by far the  
     largest to me, and that is myself  
 (l. 416)

The above lines confirm a cosmos-like persona. The persona, like the cosmos, is deathless, and like a world circling in an orbit, he perceives the perpetual flow of "the converging objects of the universe." The persona's "orbit" cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass, because it is too large--the poet uses understatement to make the point. The persona is a kosmos; he is like the world, which is like the cosmos: solid and sound, unceasingly flowing, deathless.

In Section 22, the kosmos is "integral" with the sea. He is "of one phase and of all phases" (l. 461). He is a "partaker of influx and efflux"; he takes part in the ebb and flow of the ocean, the "brine of life" (l. 459). The sea and the unceasing cycle of high and low tides are a part of the cosmic process in which the kosmos takes part. Smuts explains the persona's cosmic personality as follows: "In the cosmic stage his personality once more approaches the cosmic process--that ocean of real or potential life from which it was originally differentiated and disen-

gaged."<sup>19</sup> As a kosmos, the persona engages himself with the cosmic process.

In Section 24, a key reference to the persona as kosmos occurs. The kosmos refers to himself as a receiver of cosmic impulses; he sings, "Through me the afflatus surging and surging....through me the current and index" (l. 506). The persona's description of himself is as a transceiver, a transmitter and receiver in one package. As the cosmic impulse (the afflatus) surges through the persona, he takes its measure (index) and sends it out again into the cosmos. The persona is the measurer and the indicator of the cosmic surge (current).

In Section 31, the kosmos metaphor continues:

I find I incorporate gneiss and coal  
and long-threaded moss and fruits  
and grains and esculent roots,  
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and  
birds all over,  
And have distanced what is behind me  
for good reasons,  
And call any thing close again when I  
desire it. (ll. 670-73)

The persona, as an integral part of the cosmos, has taken part in the creation of the world; he has experienced all of the developmental stages; therefore, he

<sup>19</sup> Smuts, p. 180.

incorporates the substances involved in the geological formation of the earth (gneiss and coal), as well as the moss, fruits, legumes and mammals that came after the earth was formed.

In Section 32, the persona again refers to himself as a kosmos in a passage treating the animals that "are so placid and self-contained" (l. 684):

They bring me tokens of myself....  
they evince them plainly in their  
possession.

I do not know where they got those tokens,  
I must have passed that way untold times  
ago and negligently dropt them,  
Myself moving forward then and now and  
forever,  
Gathering and showing more always and  
with velocity,  
Infinite and omnigenous and the like of  
these among them. (ll. 693-98)

The persona's omnigenous nature was previously discussed; he is also infinite, like the cosmos. The tokens referred to are symbolic--the persona is a "reminder of life" (l. 495) who come[s] again and again" (l. 159). The animals in the passage remind him of his cosmic nature; they remind him that his existence is transcendent, that he has always existed and will always exist.

In Sections 33-37, the kosmos rises like a balloon and sweeps through the universe like a comet:

Swift wind! Space! My Soul! Now  
 I know it is true what I guessed  
 at; (1. 709) . . .

My ties and ballasts leave me....I  
 travel....I sail....my elbows rest  
 in the sea-gaps,  
 I skirt the sierras....my palms cover  
 continents,  
 I am afoot with my vision. (11. 712-14)

I rise extatic through all, and sweep  
 with the true gravitation,  
 The whirling and whirling is elemental  
 within me. (11. 952-54)

As the persona rises, he metamorphoses from a personified God whose hands are large enough to cover continents and whose elbows can rest in "sea-gaps" into a comet "speeding through space....speeding through heaven and the stars" (1. 790). As a comet whirling through space, the persona is again a kosmos. The whirling is "elemental" within him because he is like the cosmos and part of the cosmos. (For a full discussion of the cosmic imagery in Section 33, see Chapter 4.)

In Section 40 the kosmos reveals his power to inspire:

I do not ask who you are....that is not  
 important to me,  
 You can do nothing and be nothing but  
 what I will infold you.

As a kosmos, the persona can invade the personalities of others both physically and psychically. He tran-

scends his own body and "becomes" other people. "I become my presence or truth of humanity," he sings (l. 941).

Perhaps the best description of the persona as a kosmos is in Section 44:

I am an acme of things accomplished,  
and I an encloser of things to  
be . . . (l. 1149)

My embryo has never been torpid....  
nothing could overlay it;  
For it the nebula cohered to an  
orb....the long slow strata piled  
to rest it on....vast vegetables  
gave it sustenance,  
Monstrous sauroids transported it in  
their mouths and deposited it with  
care.  
All forces have been steadily em-  
ployed to complete and delight me.  
Now I stand on this spot with my soul.  
(ll. 1163-68)

The kosmos of the foregoing passage lives eternally in the present. He is the "acme of things accomplished," and "an encloser of things to be." In other words, his existence is the result of "all forces" in the present and in the past, and he will continue to be influenced by the forces of the future. His embryo was never inactive, and nothing could "overlay" or prevent its development by narrowing it, because his existence was as ineluctable as the creation of the cosmos. He acknowledges the evolutionary processes involved both in the development of the cosmos and in his own

development by his reference to the "nebula," the rarefied gas and dust of interstellar space, which "cohered to an orb," the earth's orbit, setting off the processes that would ultimately create life.

The kosmos has a cosmic view of the universe:

There is no stoppage, and never can be  
stoppage;  
If I and you and the worlds and all be-  
neath or upon their surfaces, and all  
the palpable life, were this moment  
reduced back to a pallid float, it  
would not avail in the long run,  
We should surely bring up again where  
we now stand,  
And as surely go as much farther, and  
then farther and farther. (ll. 1189-92)

The universe is infinite; it has always been infinite and it will remain so. If all "life" were reduced back to its primordial condition, the universe would remain. Worlds again would develop, and so would human life, in an infinitely expanding cosmic plan.

The persona continues his cosmic vision:

A few quadrillions of eras, a few  
octillions of cubic leagues, do  
not hazard the span, or make it  
impatient,  
They are but parts....any thing is  
but a part.

See ever so far....there is limitless  
space outside of that,  
Count ever so much....there is limit-  
less time around that . . .  
(ll. 1192-96)



I know that I have the best of time  
and space--and that I was never  
measured, and never will be measured.  
(l. 1198)

I have glossed the above passage as follows:

In this vision which the "kosmos" has  
of the cosmos, time has become meaning-  
less. "Quadrillions of eras" will not  
bridge the span of time from the earliest  
beginnings ("the pallid float") to the  
present. The cosmos is non-temporal,  
infinite, all-encompassing, and all-em-  
bracing--and so by identification is the  
"kosmos" or persona.<sup>20</sup>

The following lines explain the kosmos as the em-  
bodiment of the cosmic self:

If you would understand me go to the  
heights or watershore,  
The nearest gnat is an explanation and  
a drop or the motion of waves a key,  
The maul the oar and the handsaw second  
my words. (ll. 1248-50)

The kosmos, the cosmic self, is found in nature--in the  
mountains, at the edge of the ocean, in a drop of water  
or a surge of the wave. Even man-made objects like the  
hammer, the oar, and the saw, are part of the cosmos,  
but because they are not natural objects, they echo the  
words of the kosmos--they do not speak them.

The persona, as the physical and symbolic

<sup>20</sup> Welty, p. 104.

embodiment of the cosmos, may be viewed as "speaking for the human race from its faint inception to its future culmination,"<sup>21</sup> according to Allen, who cites the following lines as evidence for his assertion:

The past and present wilt--I have  
fill'd them, and emptied them,  
And proceed to fill my next fold of  
the future. (ll. 1309-10)

Again the kosmos is described as existing in the eternal present, which includes the past, the present, and the future. To a kosmos, the distinctions are irrelevant. The above passage is the final word the poet has regarding his cosmic self. He has finally finished writing his "omnivorous words" (l. 1080).

<sup>21</sup> Allen, Walt Whitman as Man, p. 39.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Four critical conceptualizations of the persona of "Song of Myself" have been discussed in this thesis: (1) the persona as hero, (2) the persona as dualistic self, (3) the persona as protean self, and (4) the persona as kosmos. I find the fourth conceptualization the most appropriate and satisfying because its ambit is large enough to include and explain the other three conceptualizations, which are narrower. In fact, each succeeding conceptualization of the persona is broader than the one that immediately precedes it.

The conceptualization of the persona as mystic self was treated in Chapter 3. While an understanding of the persona of "Song of Myself" as mystic self may explain the protean nature of the persona, such a conceptualization leaves many questions about the cosmos in "Song of Myself" unanswered. Only a reading of the persona as kosmos can explain the persona's view of the universe in "Song of Myself."

To recapitulate my view of the persona as a kosmos, I cite the following final quotation on this point from my published article:

The poet's view of his own self in "Song of Myself" is a cosmic one. When the poet refers to his self, he is not referring to the physical body or the psyche, or the soul. The poet is referring to that cosmic sense of self that transcends the individual body and mind, that inspirits itself in all objects of all thought and runs through all things. The cosmic self is Wordsworthian in a sense, but larger in compass. It includes Nature, man, the soul, and God. It is non-temporal, infinite, ubiquitous, and omniscient. Whitman conceives of the poet's persona as cosmic, and when he refers to himself as a "kosmos" he means that the poet is that rare individual who has a sense of the cosmic self in all its dimensions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Welty, p. 105.

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